Cambridge Elements

Elements in Child Development
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EARLY CHILDHOOD
AND DIGITAL MEDIA

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Abstract: Screen time, defined as estimates of child time spent with digital media, is considered harmful to very young children. At the same time, the use of digital media by children under 5 years of age has increased dramatically, and with the advent of mobile and streaming media can occur anywhere and at any time. Digital media have become an integral part of family life. Imprecise global screen time estimates do not capture multiple factors that shape family media ecology. In this Element, we discuss the need to shift the lens from screen time measures to measures of family media ecology, describe the new Dynamic, Relational, Ecological Approach to Media Effects Research (DREAMER) framework, and more comprehensive digital media assessments. We conclude this Element with a roadmap for future research using the DREAMER framework to better understand how digital media use is associated with child outcomes.

Keywords: early childhood, digital media, family media ecology, media content, media context
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